

Audrey's own college is a lab for new education

By Patricia McCormack
UPI education editor

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NEW YORK — Audrey C. Cohen sometimes tilts her head and strains to get a better look at the Statue of Liberty.

Miss Liberty is framed by Mrs. Cohen's office window, which overlooks New York harbor.

"She inspires me," said Mrs. Cohen, a curly-haired blonde. "She stands for new opportunities, opening doors, social justice, new ideas. That's what my life's about."

These days Miss Liberty is encased in metal scaffolding and her torch has been lowered as she gets her face and everything redone.

"She still looks gorgeous," said Mrs. Cohen, who says she is the only female college president who founded her own college.

Hers is the College for Human Services, started 20 years ago in New York as a kind of laboratory for a new kind of college education. It evolved from the Women's Talent Corps funded by the government. There are campuses in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., and Oakland, Calif.

The college blends theory and practice for people employed in service-related professions. All students must hold full-time jobs. Some of what's taught is practiced at work.

President Cohen said the new model of college for America aims to revitalize education and fit people for the new era in America, the service era — where some 72 percent of the jobs are.

"It is the new society," she said. "By service I don't necessarily mean menial jobs — in fact, that is what often comes to mind when people think about the service economy."

"They think of making beds, or sweeping, or cleaning, some of the traditional female occupations."

Mrs. Cohen said it's vital to focus on the sophisticated segment of services.

"Service, particularly producer services — those services that enable corporations to function, such as finance, legal, insurance, advertising, and banking — lead the way," she said.

"They account for 27 percent of this nation's GNP and are the fastest sector in our economy."

Mrs. Cohen said the revolution in service is as wide and deep as the agricultural and industrial revolutions were but schools haven't caught up.

In response to it, her school devised a unique curriculum and fielded the first para-legal courses, first teacher-assistant programs and others now part of the education mainstream.

She is proud that it is possible to earn a bachelor's degree at her school in less than three years while still advancing on the job.

Mrs. Cohen now is setting up an experimental junior high curriculum in a Harlem school. This, too, will attempt to better prepare young people for work in the service revolution.

"People in services produce services that help make American business run," Mrs. Cohen said.



Audrey C. Cohen is president and founder of her own N.Y. college.

"Banking, travel, hospitals, geriatrics are a few of the areas. I'm talking about profit and non-profit sectors. People need to be prepared for superior humane practice in human service."

"There are two kinds of colleges in the United States: the College for Human Services, and all others," a flyer on the school starts out.

It's truth, according to a report in "The Harvard Education Review." It said the program and vision that inspires Mrs. Cohen are revolutionary.

"They reflect a single-minded commitment to making learners explicitly conscious of the dynamics that govern their own performance and development, based on the key assumption that a person can control what he or she consciously grasps."

"If applied throughout higher education, Cohen's ideas could hasten its revitalization."

Human service practitioners were described by Mrs. Cohen as generalists who draw on a variety of knowledge and skills — communications, counseling, working in groups — to meet needs of all kinds of people, including children, elderly, adolescents, parents, physically handicapped, the abused.

At the school students learn to be human service professionals — "expert problem solvers who have learned how to develop approaches that work."

Mrs. Cohen said they are committed to "the simple idea that all human beings have the capacity to grow toward better management of their lives and fuller realization of their potential as self-directed creative members of society."

As for education being behind the times, Mrs. Cohen said during the industrial revolution education was shaped to the model of the factory.

"It was segmented, broken into pieces and people learned piece by piece and we would one day put it together on the job," she said. "That was a mirror of the factory model of education."

"Now everyone is into buying service and people will switch to get better service. And the companies that succeed are the ones that offer better services."

Living Today



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first grade he was teased by sixth graders who would pick him up and leave him stranded on some high place when they left the room.

At school, the doors were too heavy and the door handles too high. Stephen learned to scurry into the building when someone else opened the door, but there were times when he would be left trapped in the bathroom.

By the end of the first grade, however, the kids had stopped teasing him, and in his later years at Barratt Elementary School, officials installed lower door handles and a stool at the water fountain.

Long after the kids had stopped being cruel, however, some of them started being too kind, patronizing him and babying him. He played Little League baseball and proved to have good hand-eye coordination. But whenever he hit the ball, the second baseman would overthrow the ball to first, and the first baseman would intentionally fumble. As Stephen rounded the bases toward home, both teams would decide that the run didn't really count.

"I told them I didn't want to be treated that way," says Stephen.

Now that he is in junior high, Stephen travels the longer distances from class to class in a motorized kind of wheelchair. Getting around is easier, but his father knows that "the truth of the matter is he's just entering the age when it will be the hardest." The disparity in heights will become even more apparent, just at an age when everyone is begin-

